

NEWS

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USDA Accepts 5.9 Million Acres Into the Conservation Reserve Program

OLYMPIA, WA, Jan. 29, 1998 - Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman announced today that the U.S. Department of Agriculture will accept 5.9 million acres of environmentally sensitive farmland into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

"Once again USDA has maintained its goal of enrolling the most environmentally sensitive land, keeping productive farmland in production, and being fair to taxpayers in providing the most environmental bang for the buck. "

"The 5.9 million acres we are accepting today will result in a 13 percent increase in environmental benefits compared to the acres accepted in the 15th sign-up and these acres have double the average environmental benefits of the program from one year ago," Glickman said. "While increasing the amount of environmentally sensitive land in the CRP, we will also be paying about \$4.50 per acre less than the historic average, saving \$261 million over the life of the program, in addition to the \$1.6 billion saved by the lower rental rates of sign-up 15."

The environmental benefits of the 5.9 million acres accepted are significant due to a combination of factors, including producer willingness to plant vegetation on their land that provides better wildlife benefits; the restoration of more than 300,000 acres of wetlands and protective upland areas and 57,000 acres of rare and declining habitat; the enrollment of over 3 million acres in conservation priority areas; and 150,000 acres of trees.

Glickman noted that 31 percent of this land is acreage subject to current CRP contracts due to expire on September 30, 1998. "Much of this acreage is already controlling soil erosion and, as a result of the 16th sign-up, will be improved to offer greater wildlife and other environmental benefits."

"We continue to be impressed by landowners and producers' willingness to make their CRP offers as environmentally beneficial as possible," Glickman said. "Their cooperation, the hard work of USDA's employees and our state and local partners are what is making this program a huge success for the American people and our environment."

The Environmental Benefits Index (EBI), which ranks CRP offers based on six environmental factors and a cost factor, was changed for this sign-up to address air quality, wildlife benefits, and reflect the diversity of the land offered for CRP. In addition, the EBI now awards additional points to those who offer land at less than the maximum payment rate and places greater weight on environmental factors.

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For the 16th sign-up, CRP offers with an EBI score of 247 or greater will be accepted into the program. This EBI threshold is lower than that for the 15th sign-up because USDA applied a cost factor of 150 points rather than the 200 used in the 15th sign-up. Applying 150 points reduced the weight of the per acre rental cost, resulting in a greater emphasis on enrolling particularly sensitive lands. The 247 point threshold roughly equals 273 points under the EBI used for sign-up 15.

"After the 15th sign-up, producers in areas with higher land rental rates were concerned that very environmentally sensitive lands were not accepted because of their higher costs," Glickman said. "In evaluating sign-up 16 offers, we determined that we could accept more sensitive land in these areas with only a slight increase in overall per acre rental cost. We were very pleased with the environmental benefits gained; for instance, 40 percent of the acreage accepted as a result of this change are very susceptible to erosion, having an erosion index of 15 or greater."

As with sign-up 15, the regional distribution of acreage in the CRP remains stable while environmental benefits increase. Retiring this land will not have a significant effect on commodity prices, farm income, or the United States' ability to supply world markets with agricultural products.

The new enrollment will bring the total acres in the CRP to 29.9 million acres on October 1, 1998. This compares to 28.7 million acres currently enrolled of which 4.8 million are subject to contracts that will expire September 30, 1998. The statutory maximum number of acres that can be enrolled in the program at any one time is 36.4 million. Landowners offered 9.5 million acres during the 16th sign up. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) will immediately begin to notify farmers and ranchers of USDA's decisions regarding their CRP offers.

Glickman said that USDA is likely to hold another general CRP sign-up during the fall of 1998. He urged farmers and ranchers to look into the CRP's Continuous Sign-Up option to enroll special conservation practices that yield high environmental benefits. Eligible practices include riparian buffers, field windbreaks, and grass waterways. Producers may submit offers under the Continuous Sign-Up option throughout the year at local USDA service centers.

The CRP is an effective, voluntary approach to improving the environment utilizing partnerships between individuals and the government. Landowners and operators establish long-term conservation practices on erodible and environmentally sensitive land in exchange for 10-15 years of annual rental payments and cost-share assistance for adopting and maintaining those practices. Contracts between USDA and landowners establish the rental rates and cost share assistance to be paid over life of the contracts.

Additional CRP information can be obtained from the FSA CRP information page on the Internet at www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crpinfo.htm.

NOTE: Farm Service Agency (FSA) news releases and media advisories are available on the World Wide Web at FSA's Home Page: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>

	SIGN-UP 16	TOTAL
STATE	OFFERS (ACRES)	APPROVED SIGN-UP 16
ALABAMA	145,287	81,227
ALASKA	138	0
ARKANSAS	41,350	12,058
CALIFORNIA	17,142	15,111
COLORADO	506,190	362,645
CONNECTICUT	102	72
DELAWARE	472	404
FLORIDA	15,699	6,655
GEORGIA	102,910	27,016
IDAHO	84,087	63,299
ILLINOIS	203,016	133,750
INDIANA	91,298	46,440
IOWA	446,461	341,234
KANSAS	544,927	369,317
KENTUCKY	76,553	49,468
LOUISIANA	45,212	30,421
MAINE	9,052	4,423
MARYLAND	3,653	2,103
MASSACHUSETTS	247	15
MICHIGAN	70,798	50,408
MINNESOTA	519,989	455,178
MISSISSIPPI	142,403	89,364
MISSOURI	295,309	178,760
MONTANA	1,079,134	739,920
NEBRASKA	316,489	178,315
NEVADA	597	544
NEW JERSEY	1,603	951
NEW MEXICO	12,573	9,992
NEW YORK	12,847	11,293
NORTH CAROLINA	28,541	13,499
NORTH DAKOTA	1,144,009	549,908
OHIO	65,734	33,976
OKLAHOMA	341,323	136,122
OREGON	82,945	60,135
PENNSYLVANIA	16,021	14,850
PUERTO RICO	370	363
SOUTH CAROLINA	61,660	23,874
SOUTH DAKOTA	616,273	154,506
TENNESSEE	73,965	31,495
TEXAS	1,397,676	944,792
UTAH	53,952	40,155
VIRGINIA	18,996	8,132
WASHINGTON	591,217	483,918
WEST VIRGINIA	263	120
WISCONSIN	169,005	138,140
WYOMING	57,342	30,005
U.S.	9,504,835	5,924,375